“Winners Are Just Losers Who Win”; Diving Deep into the Social Reality Constructed by Conservative Media through ‘Lady Ballers’ (2023)

There is No Hope here for Ye weary traveler turn back lest ye allow the brainworms of reactionary politics consume you whole!

By Sapote Soplamoco

Note from the Author: Everything before you was taken over 6 months during my Fall semester at College of the Canyons. I mention this because before writing, I was in what one calls in the transgender community a “pre-transition” phase of life. As of writing this, I have been taking my prescribed 2 milligrams of estradiol prescribed to me by my doctor for the past few weeks. This is vital to understanding this article because upon beginning my transition, this article and its content have radically transformed in context. Said context being that this was gathered at a point in my life before I was able to fully grasp and understand the material and social consequences of a film like this and its impact on me the author. For a more detailed analysis please see the “post-” section.

The Abstract

This “study” can be defined as more of an experiment in implementing the writing style of gonzo journalism attributed to Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, while also applying the mixed-method

sociological analysis to the 2023 sports comedy film “Lady Ballers” by the far-right conservative media company *The Daily Wire.*

Contextualizing the Methodology of Madness (Preliminary Notes)

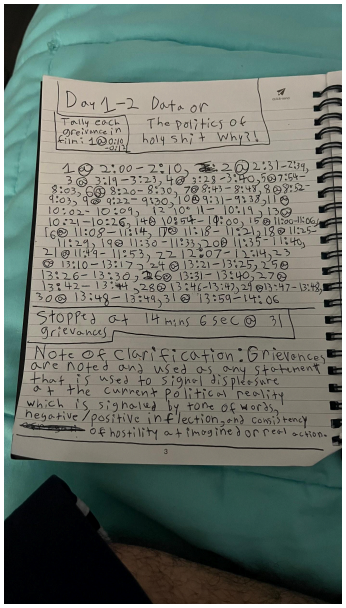
To give context on the methods of analysis I used and *why,* I would like to begin by giving context on the reviews I had consumed before writing about this film. Firstly, I listened to a review from the Intenet comedy podcast *Western Kabuki* the episode titled “Lady Ballers ft. Matt Lieb.” This episode is exclusive to Patreon subscribers, a payment platform where creators can give out tiers of access in exchange for exclusive content. What is important about this is that one of the co-hosts is an infamous trashposter (trashposting being “the activity of posting deliberately provocative or off-topic comments on social media, typically in order to upset others or distract from the main conversation”) from a Twitter user named Junlper (pronounced Juniper). Juniperhad mentioned that the film was primarily one based upon grievances, claiming this in the premium episode of the podcast “One of them mentions sensitivity training, and I’m like ‘that’s a really weirdly specific grievance’ and at this point in the movie I realized this is just a way to get out their grievances” (Western Kabuki, 35:08 - 35:20). Alongside this, I had listened to the podcast *It Could Happen Here* a daily news show with Robert Madison Evans an iHeartRadio podcast host and investigative journalist who has reported on global conflicts and online extremism.More precisely, I listened to his 2 part episodes on the Daily Wire alongside the episode the podcast did on the movie. These two preliminary sources led me to question why, despite the movie gaining traction and ridicule amongst left-wing reviewers, hadn’t anyone gone out of their way and counted every grievance within the film. This was the foundation of a maddening prison I had made for myself for the next 6 months.

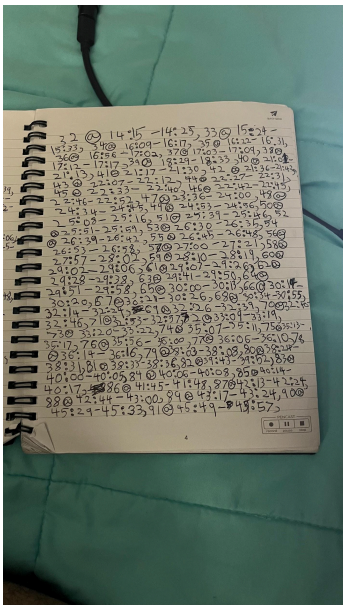
First, it began with how I wanted to count some measures I could track throughout this film. In the dark Lovecraftian corners of my mind, an idea began to sprout: keep a numbered tally of every grievance found within the movie. In this case, I found my *operant definition* of grievance according to Oxford Languages "A real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint or protest, especially unfair treatment." (Oxford Languages). Alongside this, I found some studies on how I as a researcher view this piece of media that requires me to join an alternative reality where my mere existence is a threat. I recalled a study that had to do with watching what is considered "Bad" television[1]. This study as I can remember framed those who view subjectively bad or mediocre television as falling into 3 different camps: Ironic Consumption, signifying that the viewer sees a product as "Bad" yet still consumes it regardless; Guilty Pleasure, wherein a viewer enjoys a product despite it not being in high regard; or Camp, meaning that a piece of media becomes so meaningless and "Bad" that it loops back into being good. Lady Ballers as a piece of *peak cinema* in my mind lands in the Camp category, particularly because of its backlash and production issues during the film's recruitment, production, and release. Alongside this, I kept a stream-of-consciousness thought catalog while putting my methods into practice which you will see as you read along.

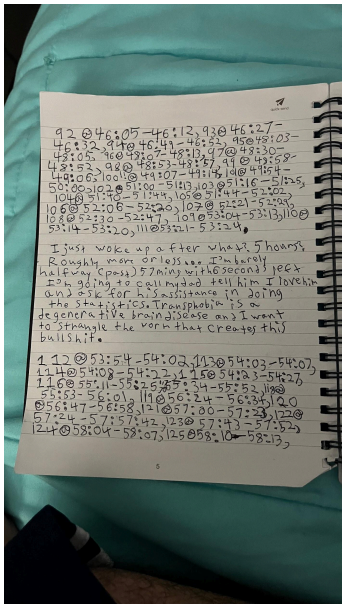
Keeping Track of the Entries

– Day 1-2 Data or the Politics of Why? – (8/21/24)

[1] McCoy, C.A., and Scarborough, R.C. 2014. "Watching "bad" television: Ironic consumption, camp, and guilty pleasures." *Poetics 47*, 41-59.


Day 1-2 Data or
Tally each grievance in 10 min
The politics of holy shit Why?!
Stopped at 14 mins 6 sec @ 31 grievances
Note of Clarification: Grievances are noted and used as any statement that is used to signal displeasure at the current political reality which is signaled by tone of words, negative/positive inflection, and consistency of hostility at imagined or real actions.



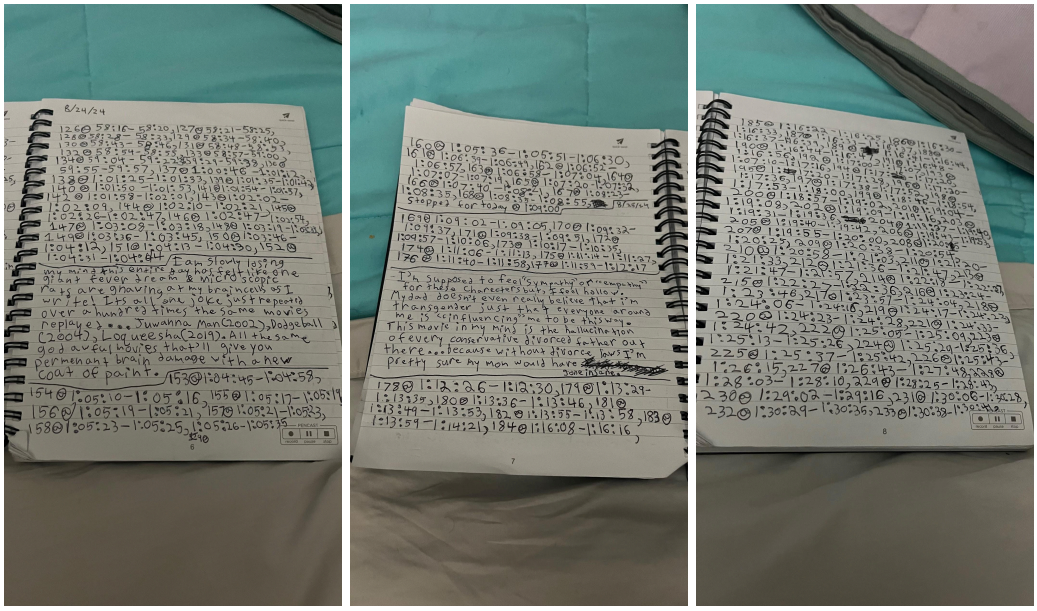

I just woke up after what? 5 hours? Roughly more or less… I'm barely halfway (past) 57 mins with 6 secs left [.] I'm going to call my dad and tell him I love him and ask for his assistance in doing the statistics. Transphobia is a degenerative brain disease and I want to strangle the worm that creates this bullshit.

Transcription of written text (excluding raw numbers on pages 3 and 5) goes as follows:

Note of Clarification: Grievances are noted and used as any statement that is used to signal displeasure at the current political reality which is signaled by tone of words, negative/positive inflection, and consistency of hostility at imagined or real actions. [page 3]

I just woke up after what? Five hours? Roughly more or less…I'm barely halfway (past) 57 mins with 6 secs left [.] I'm going to call my dad and tell him I love him and ask for his assistance in doing the statistics. Transphobia is a degenerative brain disease, and I want to strangle the worm that creates this [expletive].

– 8/24/24 –



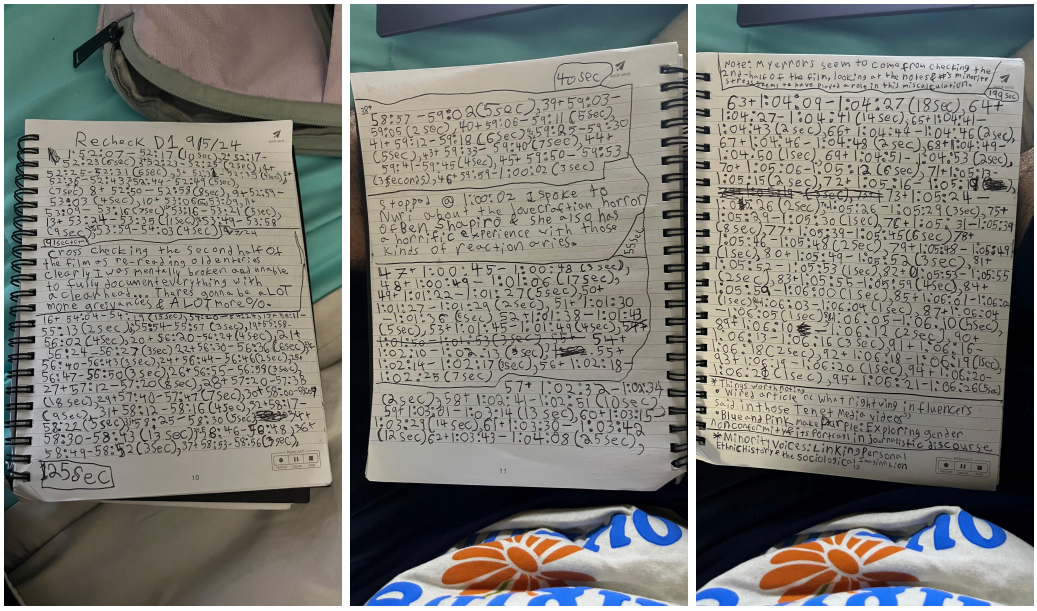
Transcription of written text (excluding raw numbers on pages 6 and 7) goes as follows:

I am slowly losing my mind. This entire day has felt like one giant fever dream, and microscopic rats are gnawing at my brain cells as I write! It's all one joke repeated over a hundred times and the same movies replayed: Juwanna Man (2002), Dodgeball (2004), Loqueesha (2019). All the same godawful movies that'll give you brain damage with a new coat of paint[2]. [page 6]

I'm supposed to feel "sympathy" or "empathy" for the characters but, I feel hollow. My dad doesn't even really believe that I'm transgender, just that everyone around me is "influencing" me to be this way. This movie in my mind is the hallucination of every divorced father out there… because I'm pretty sure that without [no fault] divorce laws my mom would've gone insane. [page 7]

– Recheck Day 1– (9/5/24)

[2] 2. Higgins, Penelope. 2023. "Fascism and the Trans Villain: Historically Recurring Transphobia in Far-Right Politics." *The Graduate History Review,* 12, 118-152. doi:10.18357/ghr12202321578.


Recheck D1 9/5/24
Cross checking the second half of the films re-reading old entries clearly I was mentally broken and unable to fully document everything with a clear head. There's gonna be a lot more grievances & ALOT more %'s.
125sec
40 sec
stopped @ 1:00:02 I spoke to Nuri about the lovecraftian horror & she also has a horrific experience with those kinds of reaction aries.
Note: My errors seem to come from checking the second half of the film; looking at the notes and numbers minority stress, seems to have played a role in this miscalculation.
149 sec

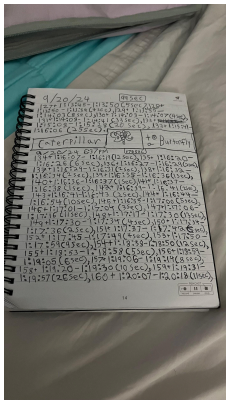
Transcription of pages 10 - 12 goes as follows:

[I'm] cross-checking the second half of the film while re-reading old entries, as clearly I was mentally broken and unable to fully document everything with a clear head.There's gonna be a lot more grievances andpercentages. [page 10]

I spoke to Nuri about the Lovecraftian horror andshe also has a horrific experience with those kinds of reactionaries. [page 11]

Note: My errors seem to come from checking the second half of the film; looking at the notes and numbers minority stress, seems to have played a role in this miscalculation.

–9/20/24–

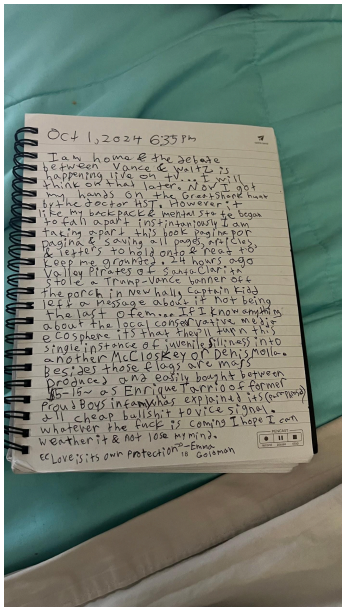


Transcription of the audio recorded on page 14 is as follows:

I…am stopping here for today uh [sigh] it is 3:14 pm as of recording and I've only recorded a good 7-ish grievances [sigh] and I can feel this [expletive] stress getting to me. I…think right now if I have to, not that I have to, I just want to…get to my next part but, I have to take my time with this. I have to take my sweet sweet time because a conservative would have you think that a story comes out of thin air but, I sure as hell know it doesn't. Like a caterpillar to a butterfly, maturity and change takes time; and I need to take my time as I write this because I think that minority stress is definitely *a* factor that affects, is *affecting really,* my ability to do research on this topic. I can't even count how many times I've watched this movie, it's about 20+ times now and I've come to the conclusion that right now I think that this weekend I should start trying to find something or find some kind of article that helps me make sense of the feelings that I get out of th-th-the that *dread* that embodies my entire mind and soul whenever I watch this. It can only be described as minority stress taken to the most extreme, and I needto contextualize and make sense of it. But, as a caterpillar transitions to a butterfly, I'm taking my time that is all…Other than that, it is a wonderful Friday; I put away my dishes, and the second I finish this recording I'm going to go outside and take in the bins that need to be taken back in because I'm pretty sure

that the garbage collectors have picked it up by now. Yeah…caterpillar just a [expletive] caterpillar to a butterfly that is all. [page 14]

–October 1st, 2024 at 6:35 pm–



Transcription on page 18 is as follows:

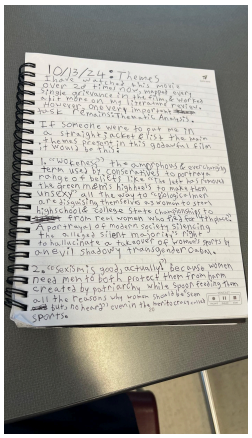
I am at home and the debate between Waltz and Vance is happening live on TV…I will think on that later. Now I got my hands on *The Great Shark Hunt* by Doctor Hunter S. Thompson. However , like my backpack and mental state began to fall apart instantaneously, I am taking apart this book *pagina por pagina* and saving all the pages, articles, and letters to hold onto and read to keep me grounded. [As of] 24 hours ago the Valley Pirates of Santa Clarita stole a Trump-Vance banner off the porch in Newhall, Captain Kidd left a message about it not being the last of em[3]…If I know anything about the local conservative media ecosphere is that they'll

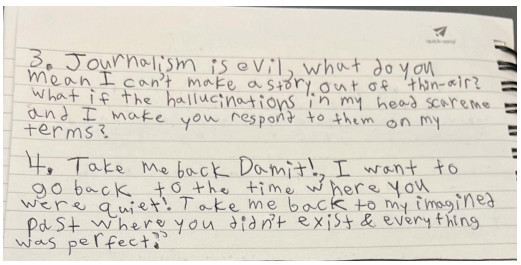
[3] Goldman, C. 2024. "*Newhall home owner speaks out after Trump flag stolen from porch, KHTS Radio.*" Retrieved Nov. 26, 2024,

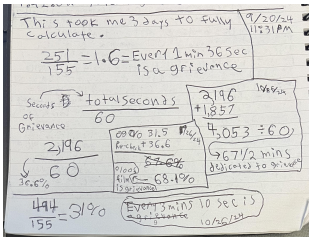
turn this single instance of juvenile silliness into another McCloskey or Dennis Molla. Besides those flags are mass-produced and easily bought between 5-15 as Enrique Tarrio, of former proud boys infamy. has explained (paraphrased) it's all cheap [expletive] to vice signal[4]. Whatever the [expletive] is coming, I hope I can weather it and not lose my mind.

"Love is its own protection" - Emma Goldman [page 18]

–10/13/24 - 10/26/24: Themes + Data–




3. Journalism is evil, what do you mean I can't make a story out of thin-air? what if the hallucinations in my head scareme and I make you resport to them on my terms?
4. Take me back Damit!, I want to go back to the time where you were quiet. Take me back to my imagined past where you didn't exist & everything was perfect.


This took me 3 days to fully calculate.
9/20/24 11:31 AM
251/155 = 1.6 = Every 1 min 36 sec is a grievance
total seconds / 60
2196 + 1857
4053 ÷ 60
2196 / 60
444/155 = 3.90

Transcription of the pages goes as follows:

I have watched this movie over 20 times now, mapped every single grievance in the film, and worked a bit more on my literature review. However, one very important task remains, Thematic Analysis.

(https://www.hometownstation.com/santa-clarita-news/politics/newhall-home-owner-speaks-out-after-trump-flag-stolen-from-porch-522766.)

[4] Selyukh, A. 2022. *"Andrew Callaghan on New Jan. 6 documentary 'This place rules', NPR."* Retrieved Nov. 26, 2024, (https://www.npr.org/2022/12/31/1146453216/andrew-callaghan-on-new-jan-6-documentary-this-place-rules)

If someone were to put me in a straight jacket and [force me to] list the main themes in this godawful film it would be this:

1. ***"Wokeness,"*** the amorphous and everchanging term used by conservatives to portray a range of beliefs like "The left has removed the green M&M's high heels to make them unsexy" all the way to "Biological men are disguising themselves as women to steal highschool and state championships from real women who tied for 4th place". A portrayal of modern society silencing the alleged silent majority's right to hallucinate a takeover of women's sports by an evil shadowy transgender cabal.
2. ***"Sexism is good, actually![5]"*** because women need men to both protect them from harm created by patriarchy. While spoon-feeding them all the reasons why women should be "seen but, not heard" even in the meritocracy called sports.
3. ***Journalism is evil***[6], what do you mean I can't make a story out of thin air? What if the hallucinations in my head scare me and I make you respond to them on my terms?
4. ***Take me back DAMIT!***, I want to go back to the time when you were quiet! Take me back to my imagined past where you didn't exist and everything was perfect.

   In total the film *Lady Ballers* dedicates 67 ½ minutes to grievances out of its 110-minute runtime. Alongside this percentage of the film being dedicated to grievances, this number comes to 68.1% when taking into consideration my original percentage count and the rechecking of grievances.

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[5] de Marcilla Musté, M. G. 2022. "You Ain't Woman Enough: Tracing the Policing of Intersexuality in Sports and the Clinic". *Social & Legal Studies*, 31(6), 847-870.(https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639221086595)

[6] Dowling, David, Patrick R. Johnson, & Brian Ekdale. 2022. "Hijacking Journalism: Legitimacy and Meta journalistic Discourse in Right-Wing Podcasts." *Media and Communication* [Online], 10(3) : 17-27.

Post-

As of writing, I have begun to transition. I feel that it is important that I make this known because medically speaking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) changes the body physically but, it also caused me to reflect on the film. Lady Ballers as a piece of cinema doesn't take into consideration that to participate in sports as a student-athlete one must (if MtF/Male to Female) have gone under some type of testosterone suppression medication for 1 year or more. During this time the athlete would have first begun at a male team before changing to a mixed sports team, then to a female team[7]. Ben Shapiro a political pundit on The Daily Wire says the following on why the film couldn't be done as a documentary saying, "I originally went to [The Craine Boys] and said 'you guys should try out for a bunch of ladies leagues' and that became not possible because as it turns out most ladies leagues don't allow actual men and [The Craine Boys] weren't willing to go the full distance in terms of what it would require to you, the actual hormone treatments and everything to play in some ladies leagues [...] (Shapiro, 2023[8]). That is the crux of this whole film, the creation of a false reality of what conservatives believe the existence of transgender people is, the idea that transness is a social contagion[9] and that it must be eliminated from society[10]. At the same time for me, this is reflecting on how I felt before I

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[7] 2022. *"Board of Governors updates transgender participation policy." NCAA.org*. Retrieved Nov. 26, 2024. (https://www.ncaa.org/news/2022/1/19/media-center-board-of-governors-updates-transgender-participation-policy.aspx)

[8] https://web.archive.org/web/20231202010113/https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QQQnzhyPz-o&feature=youtu.be

[9] Jack L. Turban, Brett Dolotina, Dana King, Alex S. Keuroghlian. 2022. "Sex Assigned at Birth Ratio Among Transgender and Gender Diverse Adolescents in the United States." *Pediatrics* 150 (3): e2022056567. 10.1542/peds.2022-056567

[10] Rodriguez, M. 2023. "*CPAC speaker Michael Knowles says 'transgenderism must be eradicated'*, *Them*."Retrieved Nov. 26, 2024. (https://www.them.us/story/michael-knowles-transgenderism-cpac.)

became what I sought to be and this paper for me, at the very least, is in a way the culmination of dissecting and work needed to destroy the brain worm of transphobia, and to show that I am for once, secure and satisfied within myself.